

XXXI.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

THE following letters have been received :—

SIR,—I have read with great interest Mr. Claude Grant's article on the moults of the Moorhen, and I hope, as time goes on, that we may have many more similar papers in 'The Ibis.' Mr. Grant has done well to emphasize the fact of the simultaneous moulting of the primaries in this species, and it is somewhat surprising to find that it is not mentioned in some of the many books on British birds, as it is a fact well known to many British ornithologists, and I mentioned it some years ago in an article on "Eclipse Plumage and Flightlessness" in the 'Field' (March 24, 1906, p. 441).

As regards the alteration in the colour of the beak, I have repeatedly noticed the change in early autumn in birds in captivity, so that I was not mistaken as to the age of the birds when I noted it in my book, but in the light of Mr. Grant's notes, it is possibly not undergone by every individual.

Perhaps it will make the matter clearer if I quote from some of my notes written at the time :—

March 26. "The female Moorhen has nearly acquired her red bill; this has been assumed during the last fortnight; I am glad to be able to note this positively, as considerable doubt seems to exist on the matter." . . . . The hen loses the red beak every winter, re-assuming it again in spring.

July 26 (of the following year), referring to the same birds which had bred during the season. "The Moorhens are in full moult, two of them flightless. Their bills are much duller, but are not brown as yet."

November 4 (of the same year). "I caught up my Moorhens to-day; only one had a partially red bill, and this has only been assumed during the past three weeks. The bills of the others were greenish yellow, but the future red portion could just be traced." [This last note makes it certain that some males as well as females lose the yellow and red on the bill in autumn; I was evidently in some doubt on this point previously.]

Possibly Mr. Grant was himself mistaken as to the age of some of his birds, as it is always hard to tell the age of a bird from a skin. I have a note of a wild-killed hen, shot early in November, in which the bill was red and yellow but the throat was white—a state of plumage for that time of year which is not mentioned in Mr. Grant's paper.

From careful comparison and other details of plumage, I came to the conclusion that it was adult, and if so, some adults must get a white throat in autumn.

I have notes of several other minor details of plumage not mentioned by Mr. Grant, such as white on the first primary; these details may, however, only be due to individual variation, and as I have not got my skins here to examine, it is not worth mentioning these matters in detail. The fact, however, that Mr. Grant considered the white throat confined to birds of the year may possibly have led him astray on the colour of the bill.

The red plate, as Mr. Grant suggests, undoubtedly swells considerably, especially in the males, at the approach of the breeding-season.

J. LEWIS BONHOTE.

Zoological Gardens, Giza,  
April 21, 1914.

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SIR,—Mr. C. H. B. Grant's note, in the last number of 'The Ibis' (p. 298), on the fact that the Moorhen casts all its flight-feathers at once, is most certainly "not altogether new." It has been known to me at any rate, and also to many of my ornithological friends, for at least a dozen years. Moreover, in a paper (*Ornis*, ix. 1897-8, pp. 15-22) dealing with those species which become incapable of flight during the moulting-season, Baron D'Hamonville reviews the results of previous workers and adds observations of his own; his list includes the Moorhen. Mr. Grant seems to have overlooked this paper, and it may be true that "no recent work on British birds" refers to this moult, but then very few recent general works have much to say about moult at all; I should have thought that this moult of the Moorhen, known

to Naumann and Mr. Bonhote (by their writings), would also be clearly known to pretty nearly everyone who had at all studied the question of moults.

That wild fowl are flightless during the autumn moult is one of the oldest observations on British birds, and was known in the 12th century (Liber Eliensis II. cap. 105), while in 1533 there was passed an Act of Parliament (25 Hen. VIII. cap. ii.) to prohibit the taking of Wild Ducks and Wild Geese (between May 31 and August 1) when in this state (*vide* Newton's Dictionary, p. 597 note).

Having started on this subject I will make no apology for referring more in detail to Baron D'Hamonville's paper, as in it arise several points which require further investigation. It is practically certain that all Ducks, Geese, and Swans cast all their flight-feathers at once, but to the detailed list given may be added *Bernicla brenta* (Trevor Battye, 'Ice-bound on Kolguev'); *Ædemia nigra*, *Somateria mollissima*, *Cosmonetta histrionica*, *Harelda glacialis*, on my own observations.

In the list there is cited nearly all the European Rails; also *Alca torda*, *Uria troile*, *Fratercula arctica*, and *Colymbus arcticus*, to which may be added *C. septentrionalis* and *Uria grylle* from specimens in my collection. Baron D'Hamonville gives on his own authority (verified by many specimens), *Puffinus anglorum*; I know not whether *all* Petrels cast all their flight-feathers at once, but I have a Storm-Petrel which is moulting its wings gradually. Further observations in this group are desirable. Pallas in 1831 (Zoogr. Ross.-Asiat. ii. p. 207) noted that the Flamingo also moulted its wings in anserine fashion, and this was confirmed by Crespon (Orn. du Gard. p. 397), a fact which to me seems rather remarkable.

But the strangest bird found in this list, and one over which I think there must be some mistake, is *Tetrao tetrix* ♂; this was inserted on the authority of M. Taczanowski (Bull. de la Soc. zool. de France, 1884, p. 303), who further remarks that the female, however, moults in

the normal manner. I have both seen and shot several old Black Cock in full moult, whose power of flight did not strike me as being much diminished! and a young male in my collection is casting its flight-feathers in pairs.

Baron d'Hamoville suspects that Grebes also cast their flight-feathers at once, and although I think it extremely probable, I have no specimens to prove it. M. Gerbe noted (Rev. et Mag. de Zool. 1875, p. 271) that the Puffin moulted its wings from the end of March to beginning of May (many specimens); but these, I think, can hardly be *adult* birds, which, at the Faroes at any rate, regularly arrive at their breeding-places on the cliffs on or about April 14. M. Gerbe recorded that *Colymbus arcticus* cast all its flight-feathers simultaneously in April (single specimen); whether this be normal I know not, but all examples of *C. septentrionalis* which I have seen, which were moulting their wings, were doing so in November (see also Zool. 1869, p. 1500); however, Mr. Smalley records (Ann. Scot. Nat. Hist. 1909, p. 141) that he has a flightless specimen of *C. glacialis* shot on Feb. 18.

To revert to the plumage of the Moorhen, there are one or two small points in Mr. Grant's paper to which I should like to refer, though with his main conclusions I agree. Birds in what he calls second plumage (=1st winter plumage) do not always have white throats or even mottled throats; thus one specimen in my collection (Oct. 10) has only the chin white, and in another (Nov. 18) the chin and upper throat is only very faintly ticked with greyish. The frontal shield in a bird in my collection, dated November 1, is as large as that of an adult in January and is dull red while its beak is dull red and dull yellow, and the tibial band is slightly marked with red. I consider that this bird is from an early brood.

The size of the shield is, I think, largely seasonal, and begins to increase in February; I have such birds showing a distinct demarcation between the old shield and the new growth. At this time, too, the surface of the shield

and bill scales off, thus producing the brighter colours beneath.

I do not quite understand Mr. Grant's remark that birds all killed in the *same year* must be examined in order to fix times of seasonal moult and plumage. It seems to me more necessary to examine series from about the same dates of hatching, for, as one can find chicks from about the beginning of May to the end of July in any year, so will the subsequent changes in plumage etc., vary accordingly in date.

C. B. TICEHURST.

Lowestoft,  
May 12, 1914.

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SIR,—I sometimes see "News of Members" in 'The Ibis,' so perhaps some information about the present doings of Mr. H. C. Robinson, Director of Museums, Federated Malay States, and myself might be of sufficient interest to insert in the next number of 'The Ibis.'

We are now commencing an expedition to Mt. Indrapura or Korinchi Peak, 12,700 ft., the highest mountain in Sumatra, which has never been visited by Englishmen or seriously collected on, though the Mid-Sumatra Expedition of about the middle of the last century, appears to have taken home a few things from there when they made the first ascent from the other side.

While we propose to take everything in the way of zoology and botany that we can lay our hands on, birds will be the principal object of our work. This portion of Sumatra is quite unknown ornithologically, for nothing has been done since the work of Beccari and Bock in the Padang Highlands in the late seventies, and of Forbes, who got a few birds on the Dempo to the south during the course of his wanderings in the eighties. So not only do we hope to get new species, but also to rediscover the rare birds obtained by the two former naturalists which have not since been collected.

The results will be shared among the Museums of the



Federated Malay States and those of Tring and South Kensington, which have contributed towards the expenses of the Expedition.

Yours faithfully,

C. BODEN KLOSS.

Korinchi, Sumatra,  
March 21, 1914.

P.S.—We have already obtained the rare Pitta (*P. schneideri*) recently described by Hartert from the Toba District; *Peloperdix rubrirostris*, *Chalcurus chalcurus*; a *Serilophus* which has apparently not been recorded from the Sunda Islands, *Myophonus castaneus*, *Chloropsis venusta*, and *Sto-parola cervicrissa*.

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SIR,—You may perhaps think it sufficiently interesting to note that I watched, for half an hour or so, a pair of Black Terns at Mitcham, Surrey, on the 2nd inst.

Six of these birds arrived on April 11, but with the exception of the two in question, passed on almost immediately, and the remaining pair left on the 4th inst.

One of the birds frequently sat on a stump in the centre of the rush-grown pond. The other never alighted nor attempted to swim, but continually hawked for insects, occasionally dipping and touching the water after the manner of the swallows.

The flight was remarkably easy and noiseless, and no sound was uttered.

I am,

Yours truly,

GODFREY C. LAMBERT, M.B.O.U.

Woodcote,  
Epsom, Surrey,  
May 25, 1914.

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SIR,—May I be permitted to make a slight alteration in a statement which I made in Part II. of my paper on my Expedition to the Eastern Canary Islands. On page 232 in the last number of 'The Ibis,' I gave a list of species and subspecies which are confined almost, if not entirely, to the

eastern group of islands, and are not represented by any species in any of the western islands with the exception of Gran Canaria. In this list I have included *Erythrospiza githaginea amantum* and *Cursorius gallicus gallicus*, and state that both these species are found on the south-east coast of Gran Canaria, while the Trumpeter Bullfinch is *occasionally* met with in the desert parts of Tenerife. I am not personally very well acquainted with the large island of Tenerife, not having visited the south, I therefore based my remarks on this island largely on Mr. Meade-Waldo's paper ('Ibis,' 1903). Since my paper appeared I have received a letter from Herr von Thanner, who is a resident ornithologist in Tenerife, pointing out that at the present day *Erythrospiza g. amantum* and *Cursorius g. gallicus* are both resident *breeding*-birds in that island.

I am obliged to Herr von Thanner for calling my attention to the fact, as the extended distribution of these two species is a matter of some interest to every student of Canarian ornithology.

I am, Sir,

Yours &c.,

DAVID A. BANNERMAN.

6 Mores Garden, Cheyne Walk,  
Chelsea, S.W.

June 8, 1914.

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SIR,—Referring to Capt. Hubert Lynes's very interesting article in your April number "Remarks on the Geographical Distribution of the Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler," I would offer a few observations.

So far as I know the Willow Warbler has not yet been found to nest in Portugal. Large numbers of them pass through on migration during the autumn along the west coast.

They do not winter in this neighbourhood, but probably pass on to Africa across the Straits of Gibraltar, or from the south coast of Portugal to Morocco. That any remain in Portugal during the summer is very doubtful.

Arévalo y Baca in his 'Aves de España,' Madrid (1887), says that the Willow Wren remains through the spring and summer in the centre and north of the Peninsula.

If so, it may be possible that a few may be found also in the higher and cooler mountainous regions of Portugal, though I much doubt it.

Arévalo y Baca also says that Mr. Vayreda assures him that some Willow Warblers pass the winter at Gerona near rivers and streams. If anywhere in Spain, it might be found to nest in Galicia or on the slopes of the Asturian mountains.

The Chiffchaff is found at Oporto all the year round, and has frequently nested during May in the lower branches of the box bushes in my small wood.

The eggs are like those described by Capt. Lynes as laid by the Gibraltar Chiffchaff, and I believe it to be the same bird. The violet shell-marks are wanting. They do not at all resemble in colouring the Chiffchaff's egg, figure 4, Plate 36, in Hewitson's 'Eggs of British Birds.'

I have three eggs from Coimbra. Of these two are spotted with small dark brownish-red spots, and more thickly so at the larger end, while on the third egg the small spots are more evenly distributed.

They are quite different in marking from the eggs of the Willow Wren, which, as a boy, I used to find in England, though the colour is somewhat similar.

I have seen the Chiffchaff at Oporto in every month of the year. It begins to utter its short song in the first or second week in February, and, speaking from memory, it sounds like *chip-chip-chip-chip, weet, wit*. Curiously enough, since I read Capt. Lynes's article in April, I have not heard one sing. It continues its song through the summer, and I have heard it occasionally also in August and November.

Unfortunately this bird has not nested this year in my wood, though it frequented my garden this last winter and spring.

I heard the Chiffchaff's song in June at Caldelas de Túy



on the Spanish side of the River Minho, which forms the northern border of Portugal. Not being acquainted with the note of the English Chiffchaff, I did not know of the difference until pointed out by Capt. Lynes.

It has always struck me as curious that while so many insectivorous birds migrate south in the autumn, this smaller and apparently fragile bird keeps with us through the winter, which is sometimes cold, wet, and stormy.

It is of course difficult to feel quite positive that the Chiffchaffs which are seen here in January are the same birds which nest here in May, but the fact that they sing so early as in the commencement of February seems fairly conclusive evidence that they are the same.

Ringling the nestlings seems the only means of clenching the matter. The chances, however, of recovery of one of the few birds which it would be possible to ring would be but remote. Yet a Blackbird, which I ringed during June in the Gerez mountains, was recovered in December of the same year in the same locality.

The migrants which pass through or winter here are remarkably mute as regards song.

In my list of the Birds of Portugal, published in 'The Ibis' in 1888, mention was made of the dialectic difference between the song of the Chaffinch heard in Derbyshire and that in Oporto, but the song of this bird seems to vary somewhat according to locality even in this country and in north Spain.

WM. C. TAIT.

Oporto,  
June 15, 1914.

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*A Naumann Museum in Cöthen.*—A Committee has recently been formed in Germany containing not only the names of the principal German ornithologists, but those of other European countries, and including Dr. Hartert and the Hon. Walter Rothschild in England, to commemorate

the memory of the Naumann family by the erection of a Museum in Cöthen, wherein are to be deposited the Naumann collection of birds with manuscripts, letters, pictures and other relics.

There were three ornithologists of this name. The father, Johann Andreas Naumann (1744–1826), was born at Ziebigk near Cöthen, and was a landed proprietor, who devoted the greater part of his life to the study of birds.

His son, Johann Friedrich Naumann (1780–1857), also born at Ziebigk, followed in his father's footsteps, and was Professor and Inspector of the Ornithological Museum of the Duke of Anhalt-Cöthen.

Another son of Johann Andreas—Karl Andreas—was a good field-ornithologist, but himself wrote but little.

The elder Naumann's work has the following title: "Naturgeschichte der Land- und Wasser-Vögel des nördlichen Deutschlands und angränzender Länder, nach eigenen Erfahrungen entworfen und nach den Leben gezeichnet. 4 vols. Köthen, 1797–1803. 8vo.

The plates for this work were drawn by Johann Friedrich.

The work of the younger Naumann is entitled:—"Naturgeschichte der Vögel Deutschlands, nach eigenen Erfahrungen entworfen." 13 vols. Leipzig, 1822–1850. 8vo.; and it is this work which is to Germany what Yarrell is to England and Audubon to America.

Anyone wishing to contribute either money or documents or any other object of interest for the Museum, should communicate with Dr. Paul Gottschalk, Markstrasse 4, Cöthen, Germany.

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*Disputed questions in Nomenclature.*—The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature was first appointed in 1895 by the Third International Zoological Congress, held at Leyden in that year. This Commission or Committee, which now consists of fifteen members, was entrusted with the task of revising and drawing up a Code of Rules

of Zoological Nomenclature, which was finally adopted by the Berlin Congress of 1901, and published in English, French, and German at Paris by F. R. De Rudeval.

There are many difficult questions in nomenclature which cannot be dealt with under the rules as contained in the code, or in which the interpretation of the code is doubtful.

The Commission undertakes to investigate such of these questions as are submitted to them by various zoologists, and to give an "opinion" as to the best course to be adopted; but it must be understood that such "opinions" are not necessarily final decisions until they have been verified as amendments to the Code of Rules of Nomenclature and approved of by the Zoological Congress at one of its meetings.

Under the title of "Opinions rendered by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature," the Smithsonian Institution at Washington has undertaken to publish the findings of the Commission on these difficult questions. The first batch, "Opinions 1-25," was issued in 1910, and we have recently received the last one, "Opinions 57-65."

As it may not be easy for members of the Union to obtain the "Opinions," and as they deal with many questions which do not directly concern ornithologists, we have thought it may be useful to give shortly the "Opinions" which are of special interest in our own department:—

Opinion 16 deals with the fixing of the type of certain genera of Linnæus, and it agreed that where Linnæus cited in his synonymy, under one of the species in the genus, the generic name as used by pre-Linnean writers, that species is the type of the genus.

For instance, the genus *Alca* was instituted by Linnæus for the Auks, and contained six species: *torda*=Razorbill, *impennis*=Great Auk, *arctica*=Puffin, *lomvia*=Guillemot, *grylle*=Black Guillemot, and *alle*=Little Auk. In the case of "*torda*" the only reference given is "*Alca*"; the Razorbill was so called by all the older authors from Clusius to Albin. We may therefore consider that "*torda*" is the

type of the genus *Alca*. This method of fixing the type holds good with a large number of Linnean genera.

Opinion 38. The Latin names in Tunstall's 'Ornithologia Britannica,' 1771, are to be accepted so far as they can be identified by the references given to Pennant or Brisson. The well-known names *Falco peregrinus* and *Falco aesalon* were both first proposed by Tunstall, and this "opinion" will, we may hope, render them quite secure for the future.

Opinion 48. Brehm's generic names published in 'The Isis' for 1828 and 1830 are in some cases founded on vernacular names or on species which he did not describe until he published his "Lehrbuch Naturg. Vög." in 1823. Such generic names as, for instance, *Monedula*, which was founded on the "Dohle" or Jackdaw, and to which he attached three specific names, all *nomina nuda*, cannot stand.

Opinion 57. The names of birds published by Hasselquist in his "Iter Palæstinum" are not tenable. This work was published in 1757 and is therefore pre-Linnean, but a German translation by Gadebusch was published in 1762, and it has been argued that the names used in the translation should be valid. The Commission are unable to uphold this view.

Opinion 61. The generic name given to the American Ground Doves by Swainson is *Chæmapelia*. It is obviously derived from *χαμαι*=on the ground, and *πελεια*=a dove, and should be written *Chamæpelìa*. Moreover, Swainson corrected what is obviously a *lapsus calami* or a typographical error in the index of his "Classification of Birds," published ten years later in 1837. The Commission are therefore of opinion that this generic name should be amended to *Chamæpelìa*.

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*An Apology.*—On page 336 of the last number of 'The Ibis' (April), there is an allusion to Mr. C. G. Danford, who was a Member of the Union from 1874 to 1899, and who has contributed largely to our knowledge of the birds of Asia Minor by his papers published in 'The Ibis' between

1877 and 1880, as "the late Mr. Danford." We have received a letter from Mr. Danford, dated Coudette, Pas de Calais, France, May 29, 1914, in which he writes as follows:—

"Dear Sir,—My attention has been drawn to the fact that 'The Ibis' of April (p. 336) alludes to me as among the things that were. May I ask to be resuscitated."

We offer our most sincere apologies to Mr. Danford for the unpardonable mistake which has occurred and which we are unable to explain satisfactorily. Perhaps it may have come through Mr. Danford's long seclusion from the ornithological world. At any rate, may we hope that now that he has declared himself, he may again contribute to the pages of 'The Ibis' as he did of old.